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November 11, 2024

Dear Hearing Committee:

I am writing this letter in relation to the hearing on whether Haishan Yang (hereafter referred to as “the student”) used artificial intelligence tools to complete his written preliminary exam for the Health Economics area of emphasis in the Health Services Research, Policy, and Administration (HSRP&A) PhD program at the University of Minnesota. I am an economist and Associate Professor in the Division of Health Policy & Management at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Prior to coming to the University of Minnesota in 2014, I was an economist at the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research institute based in California. I received my PhD in Economics from the University of California, Davis in 2009.

I am a faculty member in the Health Economics area of emphasis. In this role, I serve as an academic advisor and dissertation committee member for students in our health economics area of emphasis and I am a co-instructor for the Health Economics graduate course. I also help write the preliminary exam and I was one of the graders for the exam. As is typical, each member of the Health Economics faculty grades all of the questions on the preliminary exam. Upon reading the completed exam, my initial response was the lack of cited research, particularly in the student’s responses to Question 4. We distribute a reading list with seminal papers from health economics to guide students’ exam preparation and typically students cite heavily from that list in their answers. In contrast, reviewing the student’s exam, there was only one citation at the end of the 8-page answer to Question 4, which was a striking stylistic departure from prior exams.

Next, when my colleague distributed ChatGPT responses to the prelim questions and I compared them to the completed exam, I was struck by similarities between the two that seemed extremely unlikely to be coincidental. For example, in Question 1 Part C, the bulleted structure between the student’s answer and ChatGPT, was nearly identical with subheadings of “Compliance and Enforcement Issues:” followed by “Equity Concerns”. Similarly on Question 4 Parts A and B, the student’s answer also aligned closely to the ChatGPT answer. In particular in Part B, the student used an outline including the subheadings “Risk Selection (Cream Skimming)”, “Under-provision of Care”, and listed “Regular Audits” and “Patient Satisfaction Surveys” as potential regulations, which was again nearly identical to ChatGPT. In addition, the student included text within the bullet lists that was similar to the ChatGPT answer.

Finally, our students often prepare for the prelim by using prior years’ prelim exams to practice. The student sent me and other faculty members his practice answers for feedback (which is a less common practice). My colleague distributed ChatGPT responses to a practice exam question about capitation (which is a healthcare payment mechanism) that included paragraphs that were nearly identical to the student’s practice question

answers. This practice question similarity implied to me that the student had experience using ChatGPT to answer exam questions.

In conclusion, based on this evidence, it is my belief that the student used ChatGPT on the prelim, despite the explicit instruction not to use artificial intelligence large language models to complete the exam.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Huckfeldt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peter Huckfeldt

Associate Professor

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